

CBS EVENING NEWS
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IRAQ/U.S.

RATHER: Making an unscheduled and unexpected visit to Iraq today, Donald Rumsfeld, the special Middle East envoy. He's the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit Baghdad since Iraq broke off relations during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. With Iraq's war with Iran still going strong, U.S. officials are down-playing the significance of Rumsfeld's visit. But, as we hear from David Martin at the Pentagon, changes are in the wind.

MARTIN: The U.S. is officially neutral in the war between Iran and Iraq, and a State Department spokesman today rejected suggestions that Rumsfeld's visit to Iraq represents a change. JOHN HUGHES (State Dept. Spokesman): If you're asking, is there a tilt in favor of Iraq, the answer to that is no.

MARTIN: But informed sources tell CBS News the U.S. already is secretly exchanging intelligence information with Iraq. The U.S. passes Iraq information on Iranian troop dispositions, and the Iraqis in turn give the U.S. intelligence about military equipment they receive from the Soviet Union. The U.S. has also opened the way for the sale of equipment like these helicopters by removing Iraq from a State Department black list of nations which support terrorism. Realistically, U.S. officials say, an American tilt toward Iraq can do little more than stave off a defeat by Iran. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, seems to be attempting a tilt of its own. For the first time in three years, the Soviet Union is shipping weapons to Iran for use in its war against Iraq. Last week, U.S. intelligence spotted about 20 multiple rocket launchers moving by train across the Soviet border into Iran. That will not turn the tide of battle, but analysts say it is significant because until now Moscow has openly sided with the Iraqis, shipping them several billion dollars worth of military equipment each year. Some analysts say Moscow may be buying itself protection against Iranian terrorist attacks of the kind directed against the U.S. and France. Other analysts view the shipment as an attempt by Moscow to patch up relations with the Iranian military in anticipation of the day the Ayatollah Khomeini dies and a power struggle breaks out for control of Iran. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.